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REMARKS:

US-SOVIET SUMMITS 1955-1979ConferenceExpectations and Results

GENEVA
July 1955

The Big Four (represented by Eisenhower, Khrushchev and Bulganin, Eden, and Faure) met to discuss a formal WWII peace settlement, German reunification, disarmament, and military tensions in Europe and the Formosa straits. The Western participants were also interested in getting acquainted with the new Soviet leaders who had succeeded Stalin.

The conference took place at what seemed to be an auspicious moment—just two months after the signing of the treaty which provided for the reunification and neutralization of Austria. Coming in the aftermath of Stalin's death and the Korean armistice, the signing of the Austrian State Treaty had heightened Western expectations of progress in relations with the Soviet Bloc.

The summit produced a temporary improvement in the atmospherics of East-West relations—often dubbed "the Spirit of Geneva"—but no formal agreements were reached. Moreover, East-West tensions worsened following Moscow's suppression of the Hungarian uprising and the Suez Crisis in October-November 1956. East-West relations were further exacerbated in November 1958, when Khrushchev issued an ultimatum that gave the West just six months to come to an agreement with the USSR and East Germany on "normalizing" the status of West Berlin.

CAMP DAVID
September 1959

Eisenhower and Khrushchev met to discuss ways of reducing East-West tensions in Europe, German reunification, and a formal WWII peace settlement. They agreed to call a meeting of the Big Four as soon as possible to discuss East-West tensions in Europe, but no formal agreements were signed.

"Getting acquainted" was also on the agenda. Khrushchev was visiting the US for the first time, and Eisenhower wanted to assure Khrushchev of America's peaceful intentions. To further the process of getting acquainted, Khrushchev invited Eisenhower to visit Moscow after the Big Four meeting.

PARIS
May 1960

The Big Four (represented by Eisenhower, Khrushchev, Macmillan, and de Gaulle) met to discuss disarmament measures, German reunification, and WWII peace settlement, but the meeting broke up in a furor over the shooting down of an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft over the Soviet Union on May 1, 1960. Khrushchev demanded that Eisenhower publicly apologize for the U-2 overflights. Eisenhower accepted responsibility, but did not apologize. Khrushchev withdrew the invitation for Eisenhower to visit Moscow.

Conference

VIENNA
June 1961

Expectations and Results

Kennedy and Khrushchev met to discuss the issues of German reunification and a formal WWII peace settlement. US and Soviet relations with Cuba in the wake of the Castro revolution and the Bay of Pigs invasion were also on the agenda. There was no agreement on any of these issues.

Kennedy and Khrushchev discussed banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere, and, in the view of the US delegation at least, an informal agreement was reached. The Soviets, however, resumed atmospheric testing a few months after the summit.

Both sides were eager to get acquainted. Khrushchev reportedly wished to take the measure of Kennedy and, if possible, intimidate him. Kennedy sought to overcome US-Soviet differences by projecting an image of reasonableness. According to some historians, Khrushchev seriously misjudged Kennedy's character by concluding that the US president was a weak leader who would back down in a crisis. Soon after the summit, Khrushchev renewed his ultimatum on Berlin. The ultimatum was later dropped, but construction of the Berlin Wall began in August 1961. The Cuban Missile Crisis followed in October 1962.

GLASSBORO
July 1967

Johnson and Kosygin met to discuss Vietnam, the situation in the Middle East in the wake of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and the possibilities for starting US-Soviet negotiations on measures to control strategic arms, particularly ABMs. They came to no agreement on Vietnam or the Middle East.

On August 19, 1968, the US and USSR announced an agreement to start SALT in October 1968, and the Soviets invited President Johnson to come to Moscow for the opening of the talks. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on the following day, however, the SALT talks were postponed and the Johnson visit was cancelled.

MOSCOW
May 1972

Nixon and Brezhnev met to complete final negotiations on the SALT I agreements. The ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement, which placed quantitative limits on strategic arms, were completed and signed at the summit, but the issue of qualitative limits on strategic arms was postponed until the next round of negotiations toward a permanent treaty. During the ensuing years both sides proceeded to implement qualitative improvements in their strategic arsenals.

The two leaders signed an agreement on the Basic Principles of US-Soviet Relations under which the two sides promised to act jointly to prevent situations capable of exacerbating bilateral relations and forswore the pursuit of unilateral advantage at each other's expense. The October 1973 Middle East War badly frayed this agreement.

ConferenceExpectations and Results

Brezhnev, while viewing the Moscow summit primarily as a means of winning public US recognition of the USSR's superpower status, also wished to enlist US economic cooperation in his efforts to ease Soviet economic problems. A joint trade commission set up at the meeting completed negotiations on a Soviet-American Trade Agreement in October 1972. In late 1974, however, by means of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, the US Congress linked the granting of Most-Favored-Nation status to Moscow's agreeing to allow continued Jewish emigration from the USSR. In response, the Soviets repudiated the Trade Agreement in January 1975.

President Nixon reportedly viewed the summit as a major step toward moderating Soviet behavior by enmeshing the USSR in a web of cooperative arrangements. He also hoped to persuade the Soviets to influence North Vietnam to agree to acceptable peace terms. The Soviets made no promises to influence North Vietnam, but in January 1973, the US and North Vietnam signed a peace agreement.

WASHINGTON
June 1973

Nixon and Brezhnev signed additional agreements for US-Soviet political, economic, and scientific cooperation. They agreed to continue the SALT talks toward a permanent treaty to succeed the Interim Agreement. A discussion of the situation in the Middle East following the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War produced no formal agreements.

MOSCOW
June 1974

Nixon and Brezhnev signed additional agreements on Soviet-American cooperation and a protocol to the ABM Treaty reducing the number of ABM sites allowed each side. The US wanted to discuss North Vietnamese violations of the Paris Peace Accords, but the Soviets did not respond to US concerns. North Vietnamese violations of the Paris Accords continued, and Saigon fell in April 1975.

VLADIVOSTOK
November 1974

Ford and Brezhnev met to resolve obstacles to progress in the SALT talks. They signed the Vladivostok Accords, which set a numerical ceiling on strategic launchers and a sub-ceiling on MIRVed launchers. In March 1977, the Carter Administration proposed going beyond the Vladivostok Accords to seek deep cuts in strategic force ceilings. The Soviets, however, rebuffed President Carter's efforts.

HELSINKI
August 1975

Ford and Brezhnev held informal talks in the US and Soviet embassies on the occasion of the meeting of heads of state to sign the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. No formal bilateral US-Soviet agreements came out of these meetings. Moscow's violations of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords subsequently became a source of heightened friction in US-Soviet relations.

Conference

Expectations and Results

Increasing Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Third World also became a major source of tension in US-Soviet relations.

VIENNA
June 1979

Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT II Treaty. Following the summit, US intelligence reports of the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba raised the issues of whether the Soviets had complied with the Cuban Missile Crisis Accords and whether they could be trusted to adhere to any international agreement.

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. In January 1980, President Carter withdrew the SALT II Treaty from Senate consideration and announced an embargo of grain sales and suspension of exchanges with the Soviet Union.